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- ART. V.—1. *Obras Poéticas de JUANA INEZ DE LA CRUZ*. Madrid, 3 vols. Small 4to.
2. *El Aguinaldo Matanzero*. Editores J. V. BETANCOURT Y MIGUEL T. TOLON.
3. *Poesías de HEREDIA*. New York. 1825.
4. *Poesías Escogidas de PLACIDO*. Matanzas y Vera Cruz. 1842.
5. *Poesías de ALPUCHE*. Merida de Yucatan. 1842.
6. *Poesías de IRUJILLO*. Merida de Yucatan. 1842.
7. *Pasionarias de RAFAEL DE MENDIVE*. Habana. 1847.
8. *Rimas de ESTÉBAN ECHEVERRÍA*. Buenos Ayres. 1837.

LARRA, the powerful satirist of “Young Spain,” in one of his pungent dramatic mysteries, has represented his native country, under the name of Las Batuecas, as a narrow tract of land lying between two lofty sierras in the heart of Spain, and peopled by a race so contentedly national, that no Rasselas had ever crossed the barriers of their territory. Their very existence, says Father Feijoo,* was unknown to the neighbouring country till they were discovered by two pilgrims of love, a lady of the house of Alva and her page, some three or four years after Columbus gave a New World to the crown of Castile and Leon.

In the self-satisfied ignorance and indolence of the Batuecans, as in a mirror, the lineaments of the great Gothic monarchy are, indeed, too truly imaged. And the reflection would be changed in features only, not in expression, were we to present the glass to her colonies. For the policy which Charles IV. with a delightful frankness acknowledged, when, in suppressing the University of Maracaibo, he declared it to be “against his wish that information should become general in America,”—this policy, resolutely carried out for three hundred years, could not fail of its effect. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Spanish power on

* *Theatro*, Tom. IV. Disc. 10, § 2. The old father's examination of the story is very curious and entertaining. He received it at first, he says, with perfect faith; but, by the arguments and testimony of divers reverend persons, was at last compelled to put it among the “vulgar errors” of Spain.

this continent had satisfactorily shown that the proverb might be reversed, and that the dispositions of man might sometimes thwart the propositions of God. Every thing that was false and miserable in her domestic state, all those political and social vices which had reduced her to the rank of a third-rate kingdom with first-rate resources, Spain had transferred to the Western paradise. Education, whose ministers in Spain had whetted into truth the sarcasm of Condillac, that universities are the sworn foes of intelligence, was almost unknown in the Indies; political rights were unheard of; and the black draperies of the Inquisition speedily stifled any hint at religious emancipation.

Nor was the change which soon came by any means universally beneficial. The great intellectual movement which Humboldt observed among the Spanish American youth was confined to the higher classes of society, and its progress was fostered, not by the diffusion of popular instruction, but by a power whose character they who are familiar with the revelations of Blanco White will readily divine. The Revolution, which was its speedy result, commenced at Buenos Ayres, in 1807, by young men of rank, was mainly carried forward by them to its successful issue, under the walls of Callao, in 1827. In these twenty years of anarchy and confusion, the multitude, formerly ignorant but peaceful, had gained only the knowledge of war, and by the inspiration of this knowledge their subsequent conduct has been chiefly directed. We would not do injustice to the honorable efforts of the new governments to secure public instruction, or pass over without mention the Lancasterian schools introduced throughout the continent by Mr. James Thompson, the scientific institutions of Mexico, Caraccas, and Bogotá, the normal schools and provincial colleges of Colombia, Peru, and Chili, and the Buenos Ayrean academies of music and of engineering. We would yield a full meed of praise to the liberality of the Spanish American clergy, and to the devoted patriotism of those great statesmen, who, like Bolivar and St. Martin, gave so much of their time and wealth, while pressed with the responsibilities of new political organizations, to that cultivation of the people, without which all organizations are vain and transitory. They labored faithfully; but millions of men are not to be regenerated in a day or a year; and Spanish America, at the present hour, looms up to us

on the far horizon of the political world in a mist of lurid light, which veils her from the general gaze about as effectually as the darkness of her old estate. Her condition, her destinies, — these are problems too much unheeded, and yet unsolved. Those of us, who, like the Javanese, consider gold-color the perfection of beauty, go down in ships to her borders, to bring back hoards of patriot doubloons, and strange stories pleasant to hear, of *tertulias* and mantillas and unlimited combs, and beggars on horseback (dismal types of their country's career); but very few persons have bestowed any serious observation and thought on the character and resources of these mysterious tropical nations, with whom it is the "manifest destiny" of our country to be more and more closely connected, and who, with such magnificent powers at their disposal, have as yet played so trifling a part in the great world drama.

Whatever may tend to awaken any interest in, or throw any light upon, a subject of such growing importance, cannot, we are sure, be wholly useless. Not all in vain, then, we trust, will be the attempt to give a sketch of some Spanish American poetry which circumstances have placed in our way, and which has helped us to discover the presence, amidst the shadows and vile noises of South American life, of nobler thoughts and higher aims than her politics have yet developed.

If any good end is served by the obstinate conservatism of the Spanish race, it may perhaps be found in the materials thereby afforded for the construction of historical pictures. The tournament of ash-poles at Eglinton Castle, or the more recent ridings at the ring of the "Chivalry" in the capital of South Carolina, would hardly have conveyed to a spectator any just idea of a mediæval combat *à l'outrance*, or even of a "gentle and joyous Passage of Arms"; but the bare halls of Salamanca, and the gray-coated scholars on their annual pilgrimages, recall to mind the days of Gil Blas, with every circumstance of place and manner; and Madame Calderon's accounts of her pertinacious visits to the convents of Mexico present us with a distinct image of the desolate room in which, with three devotional books, sundry garments of haircloth, and a collection of scourges, the first poetess of America passed the latter years of her life.

Juana Inez de la Cruz was born on Friday night, November 12th, 1651, in the famous Alquería of San Miguel de Nepanthla, a pleasant country-seat twelve miles distant from the city of Mexico, so deliciously situated that it was called the Jewel of New Spain. No portents shook the earth when she "whose end in life was the justification of nature's prodigality" rose, the first star of Western song, upon the midnight sky. "At her birth," says one of her biographers, "the heavens distilled not in golden showers, as is fabled of the heathen Plato; but a sign of greater worth and promise attended her, for she was born where earth herself pours out rich gold like rain."

Of the wonderful precocity of Juana's childhood we have not time here to speak, and we must pass silently over the progress of her youth, pausing only to relate one fact which may serve to inspire the literary zeal of our fair and studious readers. Unable to grant her request, that they would send her disguised as a youth to the university of Mexico, the parents of Juana Inez took her to the city, when she was about nine years old, and left her with her uncle, a worthy man, who possessed various books which, with a very civilized taste, he had "purchased solely to adorn his sideboard." Here she received the only instruction ever given her by a master, in twenty lessons from Martin de Olivas, a teacher of Latin. She had no Latin books, but was obliged to depend upon her memory for her progress; so, to fix the bachelor's words in her mind, she used to appoint herself a task, first cutting off a portion of her hair, and if the lesson was not learned by the time that the hair grew to its former length, she would repeat the tonsorial process, and persevere till she had gained her end. "This expensive cashew-comfit for refreshing the memory," remarks Diego Callega, "would have cost many women their senses."

Juana's beauty increasing as rapidly as her learning, and probably outstripping her wisdom, made her parents anxious to secure her a permanent shelter; and she was finally taken into the family of the viceroy, as the favorite of his queen. While here, she underwent an examination by a great council of all the Mexican literati, to the number of *forty*, including "theologians, philosophers, poets, mathematicians, philologists, historians, and not a few of those who in allusive

jest are styled *tertulios*,* who, without having pursued any definite profession, are yet able to form a good judgment on every thing." Seated, *ἱερῶ ἐνὶ κύκλῳ*, like a Northern *Urtheilsring*, these sages of New Spain proceeded to badger the Western Sappho, and the viceroy thus relates the result : — "As a royal galley beats off the assault of a swarm of cock-boats, so Juana Inez flung off the questions, arguments, and replies which each of them, in his department, poured in upon her."

But Juana had early become convinced that she was the destined bride of heaven, and earthly triumphs could not seduce her from her chosen way. To the thought of matrimony her spirit had never even stooped. "The American Phœnix was persuaded that the noose of wedlock could never ensnare any earthly being worthy to be her mate." So she retired to the convent of St. Jerome, as to a pacific sea, where the pearl of her genius might silently gather beauty and greatness. There for twenty-seven years she lived, faithfully discharging her sacred duties, and reaping perpetual harvests of poetry from her cultivated mind.

In the year 1695, a terrible epidemic broke out among the sisters of the convent, and this calamity called out all the kindness and energy of Juana's heart. She devoted herself to the sick day and night. "To tell her that any one was dangerously ill, in order to make her avoid contagion," says Calleja, "was like putting wings on a bee to make him fly away from flowers." Her health, enfeebled by many privations, soon gave way under these extraordinary efforts, and in spite of the prayers and sacrifices of the convent and the city, the disorder soon triumphed over her frail body. Retaining her senses to the last, she yielded up her soul to God on the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, April 17th, 1695. The universal respect of her countrymen followed her to the grave, and the obedient winds and waves bore her precious fame even to the shores of Spain.

Her works were published at Madrid, in 1689, in three volumes, with a most stately array of praises and permissions civil and ecclesiastical. The censor of the Inquisition prefaced them with a learned essay; the court preacher be-

* This word may be best rendered into English by the phrase "nice men for a tea-party."

stowed his approbation on them in a panegyric full of erudite and elaborate gallantry ; and the third volume contains no fewer than a hundred and forty pages of sonnets, madrigals, ballads, and elegies, in honor of "the Tenth Muse, the Wonder of the Indies." Felix Ferdinand de Córdova, Cardona, y Aragon, Duke of three dukedoms, Count of three counties, Lord of one viscounty and three baronies, High-Admiral and Captain-General of the Kingdom of Naples, &c., &c., wreathed the first flower of this garland, to which marquises, counts, cavaliers, and archbishops contributed the fragrant offerings of their homage. The forty wise men of Mexico were not behind their Transatlantic brethren in harmonious lamentations, and they have left us the means of fairly estimating the domestic competition which Juana Inez encountered.

The works of this first-born of American fame consist of *autos*, written, not like those of Lope, "against the rules of wit," but reverent of the sovereign majesty of the mystery ; — of comedies, whose points have rusted in the dews of time ; — of sacred romances, elegies, songs or canticles, and sonnets. Her style is in perverse imitation of the fanciful euphuism of Góngora, and the prevailing character of her productions is mystical and devotional, pervaded by the sensuous fervor always fostered by her faith and mode of life, and which inevitably finds occasional utterance in expressions alike repugnant to piety and to good taste. The danger which even Madame Guyon did not escape could hardly be avoided by a Mexican nun of the seventeenth century, familiar with the passionate and colloquial language of the fathers. She occasionally turned aside from her graver and loftier meditations to speculate on the ordinary feelings of mortals ; and she has treated various abstruse questions of "the gentle science" with all the ability, and none of the mediæval *naïveté*, of a Provençale countess. Navarro says, "The verses of Madre Juana are so purely beautiful, that they declare the beauty of the soul which dictated them, and prove that they were written only as the gallantries of her genius, without in the least surprising her will." Through all the disfigurements of her pompous style and her quaint, misdirected thought, the character of Juana Inez does, indeed, display itself in very attractive colors. A letter written by her to a respectable mother of the Mexican Church, in defence of female education, while it shows a familiarity with patristic lore worthy of the Princess

Belgiojoso, is full of fine, womanly, noble sentiments, the outpourings of a nature deserving of a wider development than her nation and her age allowed her to enjoy. Modest in the midst of her successes, but firm in the assertion of her manifest rights, generous, self-sacrificing, enthusiastic, and benevolent, the memory of her faithful life and her truly glorious death shines out with a calm, beautiful light from the mournful annals of her country ; and we gladly turn from the "wild war-drum" of the Aztec priest, and the loud *réveille* of the American conqueror, to listen to the gentle singing of the Mexican nun in her quiet, consecrated cell.

Of the subsequent poets who have adorned the silver-roofed city we know very little. The *Repertorio Americano* notices several of recent date, the most distinguished of whom is Ruiz de Alarcon, a dramatist of some Castilian reputation ; and the names of divers others may be found in the Biblioteca of Nicholas Antonio ; but none of their works have met our eyes.* When Mexico shall be fairly incorporated into our glorious confederacy, we may perhaps feel it to be a patriotic duty to fill up the *lacunæ* of our information ; at present, however, the indefinite boundaries of our country forbid the prosecution of such a purpose, and we therefore pass to Yucatan, which may possibly be electing her representatives at Washington while we are inditing these words.

Don Wenceslao Alpuche and Don Mariano Irujillo are the two favorite bards of this unhappy state. Their works are comprised in two small volumes, very neatly printed. Alpuche, who died in 1841, was a man of some political distinction, and of decided ability. He began his poetical career with a satire upon an unpopular judge, which gained immense applause, and has been compared by his critics to the productions of the Argensolas. Elected a member

* Fr. Manuel de Navarrete, styled "the American swan," who was born at Mexico in 1768, and died at Tlalpujahua, July 19th, 1809, is quite famous for his Anacreontics and bucolics. His poems were published at Mexico in 1823. A very curious book, published at Madrid in 1825, and entitled *Lima por dentro y fuera*, we are disposed to attribute to some Mexican bard. It professes to be the plea of a Mexican gentleman in justification of his removal to Lima. With this pretended object, the author really gives us a thoroughgoing satire on the manners and morals of the Peruvian capital. Dr. Tschudi's accounts incline us to put faith in the general justice of his representations, which are remarkably graphic and spirited.

of the Mexican Congress, Alpuche became intimate with Heredia, Prieto, Pesado, and other *literati* of the capital, with whom he pursued the study of modern French poetry. Not the least striking feature, by the way, of all the South American literature we have seen is the evidence it presents of the influence of France upon the Creole mind. The ideologists have furnished the text-books of South American philosophy and morality, the romanticists have inspired the Spanish American Muse. The names of Lamartine and Victor Hugo are appealed to on all occasions ; translations from and imitations of them are frequent, and they seem to be regarded as the guardians of the true Parnassus. But to return to Señor Alpuche. We are assured by a lady-critic, to whom he addressed a poem, that he rises to an equality with the most famous poets of Mexico, and we desire our readers to accept this verdict with the deference due to such high authority. We had hoped to confirm it by some versions ; but it is impossible to do any justice in English to the thundering periods of his historical poems, or to the fiery ardor of his love-songs, which might have been poured forth from the throbbing heart of Tonga Riro when he struggled with a brother volcano for the affections of a small female mountain. *

Don Mariano Irujillo, having published one collection of verses with great success, courteously consented to hatch the fame of some of his bashful friends. We have by us his second edition, containing, in addition to his own utterances, some forty or fifty poems by different Yucateco bards. Both Irujillo and his friends perseveringly chant the praises of love and war, very much as they are chanted by more cultivated poets in happier lands ; but we occasionally meet with refreshing strains of true excellence, as in the following stanzas, which are quite elevated and noble in spirit and in diction.

O holy Virtue ! sacred source
Of art, of science, and of force,
With thy benignant light illumine
Our spirit's intellectual gloom.

Protecting Holiness ! inspire
Our minds with Faith's celestial fire ;

* *Vide Grote's Greece*, Vol. I.

On him who loves his God shall shine
The opened gates of Wisdom's shrine.

Sentiments like these, however, are rare in the book, and we think we do the good Yucatecos no great injustice in translating the following Anacreontic, as a sufficiently lengthy specimen of their ordinary style.

MY DESIRE.

Joyful with the lyre !
Careless with the wine !
Around my brows the myrtle, boy,
With mingling roses twine !
For I shun the aims and strife
Of this sad, perplexing life.

Above me, when I die,
Let this inscription shine :
" Here doth Hernando lie ;
Joyful with the lyre !
Careless with the wine ! "

Passing eastward across the Gulf, our eyes rest on the Queen of the Antilles, on fair and glorious Cuba, that " summer isle of Eden," whose name fills the mind with the most enchanting pictures of tropical beauty, the most delicious dreams of splendor and luxury and magnificent ease, — that garden of the West, gorgeous with perpetual flowers and brilliant with the plumage of innumerable birds, beneath whose glowing sky the teeming earth yields easy and abundant harvest to the toil of man, and whose capacious harbours invite the commerce of the world. In this island, so richly endowed with material gifts, we find the noblest and loftiest poets of Spanish America, men of true and universal sympathies, of high aspiration, and heroic character, whose souls are fired with great ideas and unselfish hopes, whose poems are not of stereotyped sentimentalities, tender or terrible, but manly outpourings of serious feeling, full of a genuine, high-toned enthusiasm for great and generous objects. While the nearness of Cuba to the United States, and the intercourse between them, have fostered in the minds of all the best sons of the island an ardent zeal for the independence and the elevation of their beloved country, the jealous energy with

which Spain still clutches the last and fairest jewel of her shattered crown is exerted to repress its utterance and to destroy its growth. All the avenues to the public mind are guarded with unrelaxing watchfulness, and the patriotism of Cuba, denied any enlarged and popular field of action, is compelled to pour itself into the heart of the people through strains of stirring poetry, from the lips of men prepared for the martyrdom as well as for the championship of freedom. And imprisonment, exile, and death have, indeed, been the frequent meeds of these hero bards, who, struggling with such adverse circumstances for the attainment of such sublime ends, speak always earnestly and from their hearts, in the words of brave men who have counted the cost of their devotion to Truth, and are determined to abide by her cause for ever. It is strange, indeed, that so little should be known among us of an intellectual and spiritual life so nearly allied to the best thought and feeling of our own country, and it is surely time for us to extend our free and respectful sympathy to the people from whom such men as Heredia, Milanes, and Placido have sprung.

Jose Maria Heredia stands first among the poets of his country in point of place, and among the first in point of time, — the mournful Zequeira and the gay Desval alone preceding him. The son of a patriot, whose patriotism drove him into exile, Heredia, born in Santiago de Cuba, on the last day of the year 1803, was carried in his childhood to Mexico. There, at the age of sixteen, he lost his father, and with his mother and the rest of his family returned to Havana. Admitted as an advocate in the Supreme Court at Puerto Principe in 1823, his opinions and conduct soon attracted the suspicions of the government, and, in November of the same year, he was obliged to fly to this country. Here he remained for three years, during which time he gained the respect and esteem of many excellent persons, and was induced to publish a collection of his poems at New York, in 1825. In 1826, he was invited to Mexico by offers of advantageous employment, and on his arrival there was at once appointed assistant secretary of state, and soon afterwards became a judge of the Supreme Court, and was elected a member of the Senate. He died at Mexico in the prime of life, May 6th, 1839. Besides the volume published at New York, two other editions of his works have ap-

peared, — one published at Toluca in Mexico, in 1832, and the other posthumously at Barcelona, in 1840.*

As a man, Heredia is held in honorable remembrance for the integrity, generosity, and amiability of his character ; as a poet, he is unrivalled among his countrymen ; while as a patriot, his sufferings, bravely incurred and calmly borne in her behalf, testify even more loudly than his eloquent words to the depth and strength of affection with which he clung to the best hopes of his country. Thoughts of sorrow or of hope for Cuba underlie almost all his poems. While he stands desolate and alone on the brink of the mighty Niagara, the palm-trees of his native land “ wave through his thought,” bringing bitter memories of the ignorance and vice which flourish in their shade. The following lines from one of his unpublished poems, “ *The Exile’s Hymn*,” breathe a genuine aspiring love, such as the noblest country might proudly receive from her noblest son.

Fair land of Cuba ! on thy shores are seen
Life’s far extremes of noble and of mean,
The world of sense in matchless beauty dressed,
And nameless horrors hid within thy breast.
Ordained of Heaven the fairest flower of earth,
False to thy gifts, and reckless of thy birth !
The tyrant’s clamor, and the slave’s sad cry,
With the sharp lash in insolent reply, —
Such are the sounds that echo on thy plains,
While virtue faints, and vice unblushing reigns.
Rise, and to power a daring heart oppose !
Confront with death these worse than deathlike woes.
Unfailing valor chains the flying fate ;
Who dares to die shall win the conqueror’s state.
We, too, can leave a glory and a name
Our children’s children shall not blush to claim ;
To the far future let us turn our eyes,
And up to God’s still unpolluted skies.
Better to bare the breast, and undismayed
Meet the sharp vengeance of the hostile blade,
Than on the couch of helpless grief to lie,
And in one death a thousand deaths to die.

* Selections from his writings, with translations, were published at Havana, in 1844, by James Kennedy, Esq., H. B. M.’s Judge in the Mixed Court of that city.

Fearest thou blood ? O, better, in the strife,
From patriot wounds to pour the gushing life,
Than let it creep inglorious through the veins
Benumbed by sin, and agony, and chains !
What hast thou, Cuban ? Life itself resign, —
Thy very grave is insecurely thine !
Thy blood, thy treasure, poured like tropic rain
From tyrant hands to feed the soil of Spain.
If it be truth, that nations still must bear
The crushing yoke, the wasting fetters wear, —
If to the people this be Heaven's decree,
To clasp their shame, nor struggle to be free,
From truth so base my heart indignant turns,
With freedom's frenzy all my spirit burns, —
That rage which ruled the Roman's soul of fire,
And filled thy heart, Columbia's patriot sire !
Cuba ! thou still shalt rise, as pure, as bright,
As thy free air, — as full of living light ;
Free as the waves that foam around thy strands,
Kissing thy shores, and curling o'er thy sands !

We have translated several other poems of Heredia, wholly or in part, which our limits forbid us to insert in this article ; as among the best of these we may mention, " An Address to the Greeks," " Lines to my Father on his Birthday," and some verses inscribed, " To my Horse," which are very spirited, but so intensely Spanish American in feeling and expression, that we dread to submit them in an English dress to American eyes.* " The Season of the Northers," as appealing to more universal experience, and as being an especial favorite with the Creole world, we here present to our readers in such a version as we have been able to make of it, premising that it is very imperfect, and that we have omitted one stanza, as much inferior to the others.

The weary summer's all-consuming heat
Is tempered now ; for from the frozen pole,
The freed north winds come fiercely rushing forth,
Wrapt in their mantles, misty, dim, and frore,
While the foul fever flies from Cuba's shore.

* Most of our readers, we trust, are acquainted with his poem, " Niagara," a fine version of which by Bryant is to be found in Mr. Longfellow's " Poets and Poetry of Europe."

Deep roars the ocean, heaving high his breast,
And smites the beach with long resounding blows ;
Zephyr his wings in dewy freshness bathes,
And floating vapors veil transparently
The glowing sun and the resplendent sky.

Hail, happy days ! whose healing might o'erthrows
The bloody shrine which May, amid her flowers,
Built up to Death, while close beside her stood
Attendant Fever, ghastly pale and fierce,
A gleaming form, clothed on with Nature's curse.

With threatening eyes the kindred spirits saw
The white-browed sons of milder regions move
Beneath the terrors of this tropic sky ;
They saw, they touched them with the fatal rod, —
Their frames are dust, their souls are with their God.

But their fell reign is o'er ; the northern wind,
Driving the noxious poisons from the air,
Spreads its broad wings above us, moist and cool,
And echoing sweeps upon its blessed way,
Bringing us rest from August's sultry day.

O'er the far fields of Europe's gloomy land
Rushes in wrath untamed the selfsame blast,
Spoiling the earth of verdure and of life,
Whelming the wreck beneath a snowy tomb,
While man lies shivering in his frozen home.

There all is death and grief ; but Cuba now
Smiles with new life and joy ; the beaming sun,
His glories softened by translucent clouds,
Lends a new lustre to the grove and plain,
And wakes them all to joyous spring again.

My happy land ! thou favored land of God,
Where rest his mildest looks, his kindest smiles,
O, never more from thy beloved soil
May cruel fortune tear me ; but be thine
The latest light that on these eyes shall shine !

How sweet, dear love, to listen to the rain
That patters softly on our humble home ;
To hear the wild winds whistling o'er the plain,
And the deep booming of the ocean's roar,
Where shattering surges lash the distant shore !

Here, by thy side, on softest couch reclined,
My throbbing lyre shall rest upon thy knees,
And my glad heart shall sing the boundless peace
Of thy fair soul, the light of thy dear face,
My happy lot, and God's surpassing grace.

This poem was written in Mexico, and was addressed to his wife, in whose tender, loving sympathy his troubled heart at last found a beautiful and permanent rest. He died in a foreign land, forbidden to labor for Cuba save in aspiration and hope, without beholding that regeneration of her political and social character for which he had looked with so firm a faith ; but his exile was cheered and his courage kept strong by the holy influence of a noble, womanly spirit in his happy home.

Far sadder is the history of his brother poet, Milanes. An humble clerk in the city of Matanzas, the name of this gifted and unfortunate man first appeared before the literary public of Cuba in the *Aguinaldo Habanero* for 1837, over a few poems of such manifest excellence, that they excited a warm and general interest in their obscure author.. This interest was sustained and deepened by his subsequent productions ; and the *Aguinaldo Matanzero* for 1847, now lying before us, concedes to him the place of honor in its pages. Milanes has been styled the poet of reflection, and the whole cast of his mind was indeed very contemplative, even to melancholy. The miseries of his country, and his own apparent impotence to relieve them, excited an intense, sustained, and painful intellectual action, which strengthened the gloomy tendencies of his temperament, and finally overwhelmed his reason. In the grandeur of his plans, the sufferings of his life, and the final darkness of his fate, he reminds us of the kindred, though mightier, genius, and the far more selfish sorrows, of the immortal Tasso, the

"bard and lover,
Whose visions were too thin to cover
The face of a false woman over."

The following notice of his character and his life is extracted from the introduction to a volume of his works recently published by his brother at Havana.

"Living in a country purely commercial and agricultural, without history or monuments, where science and the fine arts were

just beginning to appear, where nature is poetic and abounds in scenes of wonder, where the intellectual movement which is unfolding in Europe, and its accompanying incidents, arrive with all the exciting *prestige* of distance, Milanés was inspired with a noble enthusiasm of accomplishing a great social mission, and, possessed of faith and hope, selected for the subject of his songs a moral or philosophical idea, which, unfolded in a style attractive and intelligible to every class of persons, carries with it constantly a direct or indirect purpose of utility or instruction. At other times, filled with a sentiment of melancholy, he abandoned himself to lamentations, sad, though never destitute of religious hope; and wandering with solitary steps along the cool shores of the sea, or leaning over a bridge, he there poured out, in his most harmonious strains, the affluent stream of his sublime sadness. Concerning the incidents of his private life, which have given an interest to his sufferings, we cannot and would not fail to respect the silence which he has imposed upon them. It is sufficient to say, that in his laborious youth and the perfection of his works is seen the constant use he made of his intellect for his country's good; his whole life was a succession of stainless deeds. To men of an enlarged intelligence, of frank soul, and noble heart, to all those who know the worth of a pure intellect and to what extent a generous nature may be wounded, his sufferings will not appear an incomprehensible mystery, although some vulgarly attribute them to physical infirmity, and others name them the diseased susceptibility of sages and poets." *

The following verses, though they must by no means be taken as a fair specimen of the productions of Milanés, are full of the purity, delicacy, and manliness of feeling which distinguished his character. They are extracted from a poem to his wife, which breathes a noble simplicity of reverence for the true greatness and worth of woman. Fairest among the signs of promise that shine out in these tropical skies is the presence of this reverence in the hearts and on the lips of all the hero-poets of Cuba. Rarely do they descend to the weakness of frivolous flattery; rarely do they offer to woman the factitious and insulting compliments of so-called chivalric courtesy; but they address her in the language of brave and aspiring sympathy. They speak to her as to the friend and the equal of man, with strong, heartfelt

* For this extract we are indebted to a short notice of Heredia, Milanés, and Placido, which appeared in the *Harbinger* for May 1, 1847, from the pen of an accomplished lady of Massachusetts.

appeals to her better nature, calling her to break her chains of servile ignorance and indolent luxury, and to labor in her own blessed sphere, with her God-given energies of love and faith, for the redemption of her country and her race.

With Milanes especially, a deep sense of the wrongs of woman * and a lofty recognition of her capacities and duties were intimate, active convictions of his soul, which inspired and animated all his efforts in behalf of freedom.

TO MY WIFE.

Not with mere frenzied, self-devouring passion,

Dost thou, beloved, thy lover bard inspire ;

Love sweet as virtue, and as the skies serene,

Draws me on to thee with heavenly desire.

Love that is peace, and pleasure, and salvation,

Leaving brows unfurrowed, and a heart at rest ;

Only with sweet cares and amorous complaints

Stirring the calm rapture of my happy breast.

Rich in priceless memories and in hopes divine,

With smiles for every cradle, tears for every tomb,

Joyful adorations in the early morn,

Blessed thoughts when moonbeams break the twilight gloom.

Love that seeks the conquest of the great and true,

Gazing on the artist, turning from the gold,

Seeing life's true riches by the crowd foregone,

While they vainly grasp at what the few withhold.

This wondrous love, all sweetness and all patience,

Sister of pure Shame, twin-child of Modesty,

The cold world, sense-fettered, mocks at and denies,

As a sick enthusiast's idle fantasy.

But thou knowest, darling, in thy heart serene,

Holy tears are truer than the scoffing smile ;

Be thy love my glory, my poetry thy truth,

Let the sneering crowd my lofty faith revile !

* A beautiful tribute to this noble trait in the character of Milanes is paid by Leopoldo Turla, in his poem "El Lenocinio." A young girl, deserted by her mother and exposed to the advances of a libertine, yields to the pressure of her misfortunes. Shame and sorrow cloud the prospect of her life, when she chances to find some poems of Milanes. His words penetrate her soul and recall her to herself. In deep contrition, she resolves to regain the heaven she had lost, and, despite the contempt of the unforgiving world, finds substantial peace in a life dedicated anew to virtue and to God.

Well I know how fatal, when the doubting soul
Leaves Love's Eden home to dwell alone with grief;
For in woman's heart the pure heaven lingers,
Bearing fruit of Loving, Feeling, and Belief.

We have seen the career of Heredia close in exile, and the intellect of Milanes darken and disappear in madness ;* we are now to trace the fortunes of the last of the Cuban triumvirate to a catastrophe more sudden and violent, and therefore more merciful. The child of an oppressed race, perishing in an unsuccessful attempt to vindicate its rights, the publicity of Placido's martyrdom has made his name more familiar to us than that of his compeers. Besides a few translations from his poems, two or three short narratives of his life have appeared in various American periodicals. But the story is not a long one, nor hard to be understood ; and it may well be repeated till it has graven itself deep on the heart of every true man.

Gabriel de la Concepcion Valdes (who assumed the name of Placido in his published writings) was a Matanzero, born of humble parents, and himself filling no higher station than that of a journeyman comb-maker. His education was of the rudest kind ; nearly all the learning that he acquired he owed to the impulses of his own mind, followed out with all the energy of an indomitable will. Triumphant over all the obstacles of his position, and all the deficiencies of his cultivation, he had already established a high reputation as a poet, when he was called to assume the higher parts of a hero and a martyr. In 1844, an insurrection broke out in Cuba, whose results to the vanquished negroes were to the full as bloody and terrible as any which their successful vengeance could have entailed on the whites. With the circumstances of this insurrection most of our readers probably are well acquainted ; and few, we think, can have forgotten the accounts of the savage ferocity with which the Spaniards, when their panic had passed, pursued their victims to torture and death. The soldiers of Governor O'Donnell, in particular, inspired

* We are happy to learn by letters recently received from Matanzas, that the clouds which seemed to have settled for ever over the intellect of this gifted man have, at last, passed away. He is now travelling in Europe with his brother, who fully appreciates his genius and gladly devotes himself to the work of restoring to himself and to Cuba one of her very noblest children.

by the hope of wringing money from the planters, persevered in accusing and torturing the slaves long after every suspicion of danger was allayed. Slavery has few chapters in its history bloodier and more revolting than this. More than a thousand negroes (the British commissioner, Kennedy, says three thousand) died under the whip, besides hundreds who were shot or starved to death in the mountains. The British consul, Trumbull, was accused of having favored the plans of the insurgents, and Placido was arrested as their organ of communication with him. The charge against Mr. Trumbull was indignantly repelled, and is now generally regarded as wholly false and absurd ; but the evidence of Placido's connection with the conspiracy was amply sufficient to satisfy judges who regarded testimony in such a case, and against such a culprit, as an annoying encumbrance on the administration of justice. He was found guilty and condemned to death. Though he contemptuously denied the truth of many extravagant and horrible accusations brought against him, he did not shrink from the glorious duty which this sentence summoned him to perform to his race ; but firmly maintaining the justice of the cause in which he suffered, he awaited his fate with entire composure.

In prison, his demeanour was firm and serene. He welcomed his numerous friends, and the visitors whom curiosity or admiration attracted to his cell, with the calm and dignified courtesy of his ordinary life. He arranged his worldly affairs with conscientious care, and received the consolations of his religion with an unshaken faith. In the intervals of the duties which crowded upon his shortening life, he poured out the emotions and the aspirations of his soul in poetry ; and these death-songs, full of undying truth, have written themselves deeply and for ever on the hearts of his countrymen. One of them, especially, his "Prayer to God," composed the day before his execution, was eagerly learned and recited by the young men of Matanzas, and has been universally considered his finest production. It is difficult to convey into English words the fire and force of expression of this noble poem ; but we trust that the following version does not wholly misrepresent it.

PRAYER TO GOD.

O God of love unbounded ! Lord supreme !
In overwhelming grief, to thee I fly ;

Rending this veil of hateful calumny,
O, let thine arm of might my fame redeem !
Wipe thou this foul disgrace from off my brow,
With which the world hath sought to stamp it now.

Thou King of kings, my fathers' God and mine,
Thou only art my sure and strong defence ;
The polar snows, the tropic fires intense,
The shaded sea, the air, the light, are thine ;
The life of leaves, the water's changeful tide,
All things are thine, and by thy will abide.

Thou art all power ; all life from thee goes forth,
And fails or flows obedient to thy breath ;
Without thee, all is naught, in endless death
All nature sinks, forlorn and nothing worth.
Yet even the void obeys thee, and from naught,
By thy dread word, the living man was wrought.

Merciful God ! how should I thee deceive ?
Let thy eternal wisdom search my soul !
Bowed down to earth by falsehood's base control,
Her stainless wings not now the air may cleave.
Send forth thine hosts of truth, and set her free !
Stay thou, O Lord ! the oppressor's victory.

Forbid it, Lord, by that most free outpouring
Of thine own precious blood for every brother
Of our lost race, and by thy Holy Mother,
So full of grief, so loving, so adoring,
Who, clothed in sorrow, followed thee afar,
Weeping thy death like a declining star. .

But if this lot thy love ordains to me,—
To yield to foes most cruel and unjust,
To die, and leave my poor and senseless dust
The scoff and sport of their weak enmity, —
Speak, thou ! and then thy purposes fulfil ;
Lord of my life, work thou thy perfect will !

On the evening of the 27th of June, 1844, Placido received some of his friends for the last time. On the same night, he addressed a farewell letter to his wife, as manly and tender as the more famous one which Juan de Padilla wrote under circumstances very similar. The following lines to his mother bear the same date : —

FAREWELL TO MY MOTHER.

The appointed lot has come upon me, mother,
The mournful ending of my years of strife ;
This changing world I leave, and to another,
In blood and terror, goes my spirit's life.
But thou, grief-smitten, cease thy mortal weeping,
And let thy soul her wonted peace regain ;
I fall for right, and thoughts of thee are sweeping
Across my lyre, to wake its dying strain, —
A strain of joy and gladness, free, unfailing,
All-glorious and holy, pure, divine,
And innocent, unconscious as the wailing
I uttered at my birth ; and I resign,
Even now, my life ; even now, descending slowly,
Faith's mantle folds me to my slumbers holy.
Mother, farewell ! God keep thee, and for ever !

On the morning of the 28th, he was led out, with nineteen others, to execution. He passed through the streets with the air of a conqueror, walking with a serene face and an unwavering step, and chanting his "Prayer" with a calm, clear voice. When they reached the Plaza, he addressed his companions with words of brave and effectual consolation, and made all his preparations with undisturbed composure. He was to suffer first ; and when the signal was given, he stepped into the square, and knelt with unbandaged eyes before the file of soldiers who were to execute the sentence. When the smoke of the first volley rolled away, it was seen that he had merely been wounded in the shoulder, and had fallen forward bleeding and agonized. An irrepressible murmur of pity and indignation ran through the assembled crowd ; but Placido, still self-possessed, slowly recovered his knees, and drawing up his form to its greatest height, exclaimed, in a broken voice, "Farewell, world, ever pitiless to me ! Fire — here !" raising his hand to his temples. The last tones of his voice were lost in the report of the muskets, this time more mercifully aimed.

The works of Placido were suppressed by a viceregal edict, and his name was covered with official infamy ; but by the inhabitants of Cuba the memory of this true son of the people will always be gratefully cherished. Never have the rights of man found a more heroic martyr than in this despised and humble laborer, this Pariah of society, bearing in his

natural form and color the badge of disgrace and servitude. Surely his death has not been in vain. It is by the fall of such victims that men's thoughts are turned against tyrants and their tyranny. Hundreds and thousands of human beings droop and die in dumb, vulgar misery, and the world's slumbers are unbroken ; but let one hero be led out from among them to sacrifice, and his voice penetrates to the four corners of the earth. Yet a few years, and it will be seen that Placido, like the greater Toussaint, fell not obscurely or alone, but encompassed by the most faithful and unforgetting friends, beheld and remembered by " great allies,"

" by exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

As a poet, Placido possesses great power even over his enemies. The admiration felt for his writings is not confined to the Cuban Creoles. The following passage, from the journal of Salas y Quiroga, a Spanish traveller in the island, contains a eulogium upon his works, which, as it comes from a Castilian critic, may well be considered as impartial. " This man, in his half-savage songs, rises to the most sublime and generous conceptions. Through the errors of his diction shine flashes of true light ; and I know no American poet, Heredia included, who approaches him in genius, in inspiration, in courtesy, and in dignity." The same writer, in the course of an analysis of Placido's poetry, writes as follows :—

" It is truly wonderful to hear a poet, esteemed humble by the society in which he lives, addressing himself to the Queen Regent of Spain in language like this :—

Some one there is, who, with his golden lyre,
Worthier thy sovereign ear, shall chant
To the vibrations of its jewelled strings
More grateful songs, perchance, but not more free !

And these lines are equally bold and daring :—

And beats not thy heart, too ? Therefore will I,
While the pure dawn her snowy canopy
Hangs on the orient sky,
Bid my rejoicing hymns to God on high,
Upborne by gentlest breezes, swiftly fly :—
Let them who fear be dumb, for not of them am I !
If thou with pleasure hearest, let thy prayers

Swift seek the Eternal, that my songs may rise
 Even to his throne, and then on Cuba fall,
 Impearled in blessings from the echoing skies !

“ It was important for me to paint the poetic character of Placido, to bring into clearer and clearer relief his astonishing merits. I fear, nevertheless, that my readers will not sufficiently appreciate the true condition of a miserable laborer in the island of Cuba, and only by such an appreciation can they fully estimate the great value of the lines I have quoted. The vigor of Placido’s versification corresponds to that of his thought. What poet, however loftily elevated by earthly glory, would not rejoice to be the author of the four following verses, so full and polished, to which our language has few superior ?

De gozo enajenados mis sentidos,
 Fijé mi vista en las serenas ondas,
 Y vi las ninfas revolver gallardas
 Las rubias hebras de sus Arenzas blondas.

“ Almost all the versification of this poet is of this manly nature ; his sonnets to Napoleon, to Christ, and to William Tell, are three jewels of our literature ; the conclusion of the last is a noble cry of indignation : —

That even the insensate elements
 Fling back the despot’s ashes from their breasts.

It is equally surprising to see the facility with which he manages the tenderest themes, and some of his compositions touch the deepest emotions of the soul. My task would be endless, should I attempt to extract all the beauties of these poems ; for if there are very few that can be quoted in full, there is not one unrelieved by the light of genius. Their faults arise from the poet’s want of instruction, their inspiration is celestial.

“ The examination of these poems of Placido has shown me one striking anomaly. In a country where the faintest idea of a liberal tendency is sternly repressed, where the singers of the opera were obliged to change the word ‘ Liberty,’ whenever it occurred in an Italian *libretto*, into the word ‘ Loyalty,’ the government permitted the publication of such verses as these : —

Hail, Liberty ! a thousand times all hail !
 For that, propitious, on thine every path
 Thou scatterest, with placid influence,
 The seeds beneficent of science,
 Of peace, of plenty, and of justice !

These were printed at Matanzas, in 1838 ; they certainly could

not have been printed at Havana, or published *in prose* anywhere in Cuba; they would have cost their author dear. Blessed privilege of enthusiasm, which even the most ungenerous men respect!

It is only on those of his poems which appeal to universal feelings that a foreign judgment of Placido's poems can be fairly founded. Whenever he treats of local subjects, his thoughts assume forms which to American eyes would seem strangely fantastic. Even his enthusiastic descriptions of the tropical world, deeply and truly as his soul was penetrated with the teachings and the love of nature, are brilliant with gorgeous but barbaric figures, which cannot be transferred to civilized society without such a pruning of their luxuriant splendors as would destroy their individuality. How, for example, should we naturalize some fine lines to the "Moon of Yumuri," in which the sudden passing of the moon from behind the cliffs into the open starlit sky is compared to the advent into a ball-room of a beautiful woman superbly dressed, and wearing a Cashmere shawl? The magnificent empress of the Southern skies might well suggest such an image to a poor laborer, to whom the scaling of her radiant throne were as easy a feat as to gain entrance into the luxurious festivities of Cuban opulence; but it doubtless appears passing quaint to us, who "woo the gleam of Cynthia silver bright" from more temperate heavens.

Our reverence for the simple truthfulness of Placido's emotions is so sincere, that we dare not attempt to display the sallies of his heartfelt, untutored enthusiasm in smooth translations, through which they would gleam as frigidly as the holocaustic flames of Moscow in that famous panorama which has embalmed the memory of the wonderful Maelzel in the perpetual love of childhood. One of Placido's earlier sonnets, however, must be given, as an example of the productions which first raised him to distinction.*

* Besides the collections of Placido's poetry referred to at the beginning of this article, we have been permitted to use a large and very complete collection of the pieces published by him in the *Matanzas Aurora*. This collection was made by Dr. Wurdeman, of Columbia, South Carolina, a gentleman already favorably known to the literary world by his "Notes on Cuba," a review of which appeared in the *London Quarterly Review* for January, 1848. Having relinquished the idea of publishing the volume, to the compilation of which he was led by his admiration of Placido's genius, he has caused it to be deposited in the library of Harvard College.

SONNET TO GREECE.

Like waves upon the ocean's fitful deep
 Is Liberty, rolling her billows o'er
 One favored land, while from another shore
 Her ebbing waters backward slowly creep.
 Greece once held wisdom to her fostering breast ;
 Her Alexander died ; a feebler race
 Saw the fierce Turk her arts and laws efface,—
 The land of gods by godless men oppressed !
 She comes again to fill the historian's page.
 But, while from Navarino's sands her eyes
 See, eddying round the Othman navies, rise
 The flames symbolic of her glorious age,
 If Greece renews her old triumphant strains,
 Unhappy Poland waits to wear her broken chains.

We selected this sonnet, not only because it is good in itself, but because it shows the keen interest with which Placido, in his obscure and miserable home, watched the progress of the world's history, in its bearings on the cause that lay always nearest to his heart. The despondency which it expresses, the gloomy doubt, whose shadow must have often overcome him so tempted by lonely poverty to desolate despair, only deepens our sympathy with the tried and noble soul which, more devoted to its lofty ends as hope grew fainter, rose, in the last struggle, to the height of serene, unquestioning faith. The sadness of the Sonnet to Greece is all swallowed up in prophetic joy in the following "Hymn to Liberty," written on the very morning of his execution.

O Liberty ! I wait for thee
 To break this chain and dungeon bar ;
 I hear thy spirit calling me
 Deep in the frozen North, afar,
 With voice like God's, and visage like a star.

Long cradled by the mountain wind,
 Thy mates the eagle and the storm,
 Arise ! and from thy brow unbind
 The wreath that gives its starry form,
 And smite the strength that would thy grace deform !

Yes, Liberty ! thy dawning light,
 Obscured by dungeon bars, shall cast

Its splendor on the breaking night,
And tyrants, flying pale and fast,
Shall tremble at thy gaze and stand aghast !*

Dying with such a voice upon his lips, Placido surely was
not one of those who

“ the inheritance of desolation leave
To great, expecting hopes.”

For if he sought to win the freedom of his race with the
weapons of earthly vengeance, he erred in common with
many of the world's best and truest friends ; and while we
rejoice that he was saved from the horrors of a sanguinary
triumph, we most earnestly desire that his heroic spirit may
animate other more far-seeing friends of liberty to use means
as stainless as their ends with courage and constancy like his.
May Heaven grant to those wise ones his firmness of resolve,
with

“ The penetrative eye, which can perceive
In this blind world the guiding vein of Hope,
That like this laborer such may dig their way,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified.”

Around the three great names of Cuban poetry are clustered
many others of various excellence. So numerous are
they, that, with our imperfect means of information, we cannot
undertake to make specific mention of each of them.
We shall therefore confine ourselves to a notice of the few
on whose works we have been enabled to bestow some attention.[†]

One of the prettiest little volumes we have seen for a long
time is a collection of poems by Rafael Maria de Mendive,
published at Havana, in 1847, under the title of *Pasionarias*.
The name was well chosen, for the verses are full
of feeling, and combine much grace of versification with a

* For this spirited translation we are indebted to an anonymous writer in
the New York Tribune. Should this meet the eye of the author, to whom
our thanks are hereby tendered for the aid he has unconsciously given us,
we trust that he will see the propriety of the correction which we have
ventured to make in his version.

† A list of the poets of Cuba, drawn up by a Cuban gentleman of education
and taste, which is in our possession, should have been inserted here,
could we have persuaded ourselves that any human being would derive aid,
comfort, or instruction therefrom. It will, perhaps, answer all useful purposes
for us to state, that the list enumerates no fewer than fifty-three persons,
about twelve of whom have come, by their works, within our circle of
observation.

remarkable simplicity of language and imagery. Some of them are really charming, as, for example, the following, "The Virgin Smile," addressed "To Pepilla, a fair young girl of Havana."

Purer than the early breeze,
Or the faint perfume of flowers,
Maiden ! through thine angel hours
 Pass the thoughts of love ;
Purer than the tender light
On the morning's gentle face,
On thy lips of maiden grace
 Plays thy virgin smile !

Like a bird's thy rapture is,
Angel eyes thine eyes enlighten,
On thy gracious forehead brighten
 Flashes from above ;
Flower-like thy breathings are,
Free thy dreams from sinful strife,
And the sunlight of thy life
 Is thy virgin smile !

Loose thou never, gentle child,
Thy spring garland from thy brow,
Through life's flowery fields, as now,
 Wander careless still ;
Sweetly sing and gaily run,
Drinking in the morning air,
Free and happy everywhere,
 With thy virgin smile !

Love and pleasure are but pains,
Bitter grief and miseries,
Withered leaves, which every breeze
 Tosses at its will ;
Live thou purely with thy joy,
With thy wonder and thy peace,
Blessing life, till life shall cease,
 With thy virgin smile !

Juan Guëll y Rente, whose popularity is attested by the frequent appearance of his name in the periodicals and papers of Havana, having scattered many effusions of his heart abroad upon the world, gathered them together in 1846, and sent

them forth again united, under the title of "*Hojas del Alma*," *Leaves of the Soul*, in a small octavo volume whose *physique* is really remarkable for its beauty. Its rivulet of type flows through a meadow of margin, after the most approved English fashion; and neither in print nor paper would it disgrace the best publishing house in this country. The poems are to be commended chiefly for their versification, which is very melodious and elegant; while some of them, such as the verses to "*Ramon de Palmas*," to "*The Ship Leontina*," and a few others, possess still higher merits. A portrait of the author, a gentleman-like, good-looking Creole, affords physiognomical evidence of the genuineness of the productions ascribed to him.*

Spanish phraseology, we need hardly say, is pitched at a key so much higher than our own, that expressions which have a perfectly simple, unaffected meaning, when used by our Southern friends, sound like extravagant absurdities, from English lips. Thus, the righteous contempt which we feel for the impertinent and ridiculous baptismal phrases, now so much in vogue with a certain class of Anglo-Saxon poetasters, would become the extreme of injustice, if we extended it to the titles in which the Cubans delight. Besides the "*Leaves of my Soul*," we have "*Whirlwinds of the Tropics*," by Leopoldo Turla, and "*Heart-Beats*," by Manuel Orgallez, both of which books contain admirable poems. In Turla's volume, we especially notice "*El Lenocinio*," "*The Invalid Soldier of Napoleon*," "*An Evening Walk*," and "*A Night Stroll along the Bay*." From Orgallez we have translated the following simple and touching lines, on the death of the little daughter of the friend to whom his book is dedicated.

ON THE MOURNFUL AND EARLY DEATH OF ISABEL
LEONORA DE MARTIARTA.

She breathes no more, whose stainless glance
Was borrowed from the pure sunshine;

* Guëll y Rente is the brother, we believe, of José Guëll y Rente, the modern Troubadour, for whose sake the Infanta Luisa de Bourbon has given up her princely honors and titles, — well content, we doubt not, to enjoy, at the expense of privacy and obscurity, the freedom and the happiness which the stately Escorial refuses to her brother, the wretched husband of a still more wretched queen.

A star of mystic radiance,
Mirrored in innocence divine.

She lives not now, that child of love ;
Brief be the tale of earthly woe, —
God sought one angel more above,
One mourner less below.

The discovery of America, as is well known, has been seized upon by many bards of various lands as the true siege of Troy which should inspire the long-sought modern Iliad. France has Madame du Bocage and her "Columbiade"; England rejoices in "Madoc"; Denmark glories in the "Oceanida" of Baggesen; Italy, learning too late the worth of her expatriated son, has sought to domesticate his fame on her soil in the "Nuovo Mondo" of Stigliani, and the "Oceano" of Alessandro Tassoni; and the mighty empire of the Anglo-Americans boasts the immortal, not to say infinite, epic of the illustrious Barlow. Surely, then, Cuba, — so early trod by the adventurous foot of the great Genoese, and in whose fair bosom his remains now lie at rest, — Cuba could not long delay her offering at his shrine. To this pious service many poems were, in fact, consecrated by her first bards; but in 1846, the Lyceum of Arts and Literature determined to perform a more marked and public homage, and a prize was offered for the best "canto épico" on the discovery of America. Many competitors entered the lists thus opened, and three of the most striking poems then produced now lie before us. One by Guëll y Rente, filling a neat pamphlet of nineteen pages; another, still shorter, by Miguel Cardenas y Chavez; and the successful essay of Don Narciso de Foxa, very elegantly printed and ornamented. There are good passages in each of these poems; but they are, on the whole, decidedly inferior to the less ambitious effusions of their respective authors. "La Rosa Marchita" of Foxa, for instance, is much more excellent, to our mind, than all his crowned and sonorous decasyllabics.

Much agreeable poetry may be found in the Cuban journals. Scattered through the pages of the *Siempre Viva*, an interesting magazine issued at Havana,* are many pleasing

* The following cheerful picture of our own social life is taken from the *Siempre Viva*, No. 4, for 1838:—"The social life of the American woman, the display of her graces and accomplishments, and her happy smiles, all

verses, among which we notice the earliest publication of Foxa, "Aliatar and Zaida," a Morisco romance, written in 1839, when the author was but sixteen years of age. The *Aguinaldo Habanero* has been already spoken of. The *Aguinaldo Matanzero* for 1847, edited by Don José Victoriano Betancourt, and Don Miguel T. Tolon, is a handsomely printed volume, containing a fine collection of poems by various inhabitants of that city, the favorite home of Cuban genius. Among these, the productions of the accomplished editors hold a distinguished rank. Did our limits permit, we would gladly transfer to these pages the "Mendicant Girl" of Betancourt, which tells a dreadful story of social degradation with no ordinary strength of feeling and expression.

But we must pass to the conclusion of our article, for we have yet to put the girdle of our criticism about the whole Southern Continent.* This magnificent operation, however,

disappear with marriage. The American is ill suited for married life; occupied in his business, he is a stranger to his wife, to whom he reveals none of his projects; so that while he toils for wealth, his unhappy spouse resignedly waits for the day when he shall come, with a frowning, austere face, to announce the necessity of removing to some other place, there to begin again the same course of life. So isolated, the wife seeks comfort in her children and her Bible, and learns to regard all earthly things with indifference."

* The student of Spanish will be interested in the following verses, taken from an interminable ballad of the "Adventures of Juan Cabrera," printed on a large sheet of paper, like a carrier's address, and sold for the sum of ninepence. Cabrera is a negro, and uses the negro Spanish of Cuba. The practice of elision, which we meet with even in the best Creole writers, who constantly use *alvear*, *pelear*, and such words, as dissyllables, is carried to a great extent in this song.

Mientra yo canté una glosa
 Arrimao a liturmento,
 Aprovecho aquei momento
 Para requeri la heimosa!
 Deje la causion sabrosa
 Y cuatiándome arrogante
 Me le paré poi delante
 Y le dije: mi suena,
 Venga uté á bailá sin pena.
 Que ya ha convesao batante:
 Ella se taidó en salí,
 Como reipetando ei gallo,
 Y yo veló como ei rayo
 Se la arrebaté de allí.
 La dietra mano ledí,
 Y voíviéndome ai maená

will occupy but a short time, for it is completed when we have slightly noticed some half-dozen names, — just so many as suffice to show that we are so far in advance of the majority of our readers as to know that poets *are* in the turbulent republics beyond the Isthmus.

From Caraccas, we have the sadly appropriate literature of tragedy. “Virginia,” a drama in five acts, published at that place in 1824, was among the earliest productions of the tragic muse in South America. “Guatimoc” and “Atala,” the latter of which has been frequently performed at Havana and elsewhere, were soon after issued at the same city by Dr. J. F. Madrid, a man of considerable ability, who filled the presidential chair of New Granada during a very stormy period of her history. In 1825, Dr. Madrid published at Carthagena, in Colombia, a volume of Peruvian National Elegies, which have been highly admired.

But the most eminent poet of Western South America is Don J. J. Olmedo, of Lima, and his most celebrated work is a Triumphal Ode on the Victory of Junin, addressed to General Bolivar, under whom Olmedo had served with honor. Many parts of this poem are evidently “after” Horace. One striking feature is so original as to deserve mention. The hero of the ode is General Bolivar, who is lauded as the deliverer of Peru. But the battle of Junin, at which Bolivar in person commanded the republican troops, important as it was, did not secure the triumph of freedom. This was sealed by the victory of Ayacucho. Thus the poet was put into an unpleasant dilemma. In his extremity, he remembered the ancient deities of Peru, and addressed an humble invocation to the sun, the lord of time, for aid. The sun graciously listens to his prayer, and, more than realizing a pugilistic metaphor of our own times, forthwith knocks the day of Junin into the day of Ayacucho, and sets the whole matter right.

Crossing the Pampas to the La Plata, we find Don Juan C. Varela, chanting the glories of Ituzaingo, and the defeat of the Brazilian host, while as yet the Pincheyras were gath-

Le dije así, camará
Uté precure otio abrigo
Quella va á bailá conmigo
Y no hay poi donde pasá.

ered with their plunder around the standard of Ferdinand VII. in the Chilian Andes. Señor Varela marches magnificently through a somewhat prolix ode to the grand conclusion, that the fame of Greece and Rome, of all republics, kingdoms, and empires, ancient and modern, is destined to disappear under the sands of the ages, leaving the renown of Buenos Ayres the only green thing on the waste of time. "Eso es demasiado,"—*This is too much!* indignantly exclaims a Spanish critic, and our readers will probably assent to the remark.

Much more calm and philosophical are the effusions of Estéban Echeverría, whose poems bear the date of Buenos Ayres, 1837, and wear the unassuming name of *Rimas*. Echeverría is evidently a man of education. He quotes Dante, Petrarch, Manzoni, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Lord Byron, and Frederic Schlegel; and his preface contains many just and sensible observations. The longest poem in the volume is called "La Cautiva," and contains many fine descriptions of Pampa scenery. The military scenes, especially, are less in the 'Ercles vein than is usual among Spanish American writers.

With Echeverría our sketch must be brought to an end. We are aware that we have merely skimmed the surface of our subject; but it was less our purpose to give a complete account of Spanish American poetry, than to call the public attention to the fact, that those revolutionary countries, whose literature we have supposed to consist chiefly of *pronunciamentos* and military harangues, do really contain the germs of a vigorous intellectual life,—germs which promise the development of a purer and more stable society. Like those ancient palaces and temples of their country, which the growth of the wilderness has hidden for centuries from the eyes of man, these best sons of Spanish America are, indeed, surrounded by an overwhelming multitude of the ignorant, the vicious, and the miserable. But while those piles of inanimate grandeur lie helpless and inert at the mercy of their vegetable foes, the divine energy which inspires the patriot and the sage finds a secret ally in the heart of the most depraved; for, in the words of the Lusitanian Cicero, "Tam est in natura hominum insitum divinæ virtutis et sapientiæ similitudinem optare, quam cœlo in orbem verti, quam igni superiorem regionem appetere, quam terræ in medium mundi

locum undique conglobari.” While, therefore, this faith makes its home in our soul, we will not despair even of degraded and unhappy South America, seeing some flashes of poetic light above the general darkness, and remembering that, “amidst all the evils that the ancients did fabulously report to be in Pandora’s box, they wittily placed hope on the utmost lip of it and extremity.”

ART. VI. — *Significance of the Alphabet.* By CHARLES KRAITSIR, M. D. Boston: E. P. Peabody. 1846. 12mo. pp. 58.

WE hear much of the study of languages, but very little hitherto of the study of language. This most important and interesting branch of knowledge has not, up to this time, even been numbered among the natural sciences. This fact alone sufficiently attests how narrow and incorrect are our ideas on this subject. Nothing, indeed, can be more surprising than our total ignorance upon a matter continually claiming our attention, except, perhaps, the contentment with which we endure it. It would almost seem that, in our eyes, the study of language labored under some divine interdict, and that — actuated by a sentiment akin to that of the pious member of the British Parliament, who feared lest the enactments of that body in favor of the Jews should defeat the designs of Providence — we felt bound, by a religious obligation, to leave the languages of earth for ever under that curse of confusion in which the presumption of the heaven-scaling architects involved them.

The claims of the other sciences are fully recognized among us. Those which are, by distinction, called the Natural, enjoy a peculiar favor. Their manifest utility, the direct influence they have upon the arts of life, recommend them to our practical nation. The researches of chemists and naturalists, and the discoveries to which they lead, excite even a popular interest. But on the subject of language, the public mind is in a state of entire apathy; this most interesting and truly living science is regarded as a mere dead matter of books and parchments, the province of the pedant and